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ESSAY on IRISH MUSIC.

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You too, ye Bards, whom facred raptures fire To chaunt your heroes to your country's lyre; Who confecrate in your immortal strain Brave patriot souls in righteous battle slain; Securely now the tuneful task renew, And nobler themes in deathless songs pursue.

LUCAN.

THE early ages of every nation are enveloped in dark clouds, impervious to the rays of historic light. An attempt, therefore, (fays an ingenious Writer) to trace the arts of Poetry and Music to their source in this, or in any other country, must be unsuccessful: They are coeval with its original inhabitants; for man is both a Poet and Musician by nature. But our business with those arts does not commence till an order of men, who for some time united both characters, appears in the Annals of Ireland." (a)

Irish historians trace their Music and Bards to a very high antiquity. Whence they were derived is indeed not quite so certain; but it is commonly supposed that the Irish received them from the Milesians, and the Milesians from some parts of the East. It is certain the Druids and Bards had colleges in Ireland prior to the fifth century. The Bards originally received their education from the Druids, who were the priests of those times; whose laws and sciences were conveyed through the medium of Poetry, and recommended by the charms of Music. Their instructions, however, were always oral; neither their policy, nor the superstition of the times, suffering them to be committed

to writing; fo that the education of a young Bard was feldom compleated under a dozen years. These accomplished, he was honoured with a kind of Doctor's degree, called *Ollamb*, supposed sufficiently qualified for all the duties of his office, and sometimes admitted among the Druids.

At this early period the Bards, originally a fingle order of men, were divided into the following classes, all of which had some concern with Music:

The Filea, or Poet, whose office it was to turn the precepts of religion into verse—to compose birth-day odes, epithalamiums, martial odes, &c.—to teach their princes—to entertain the chiestains and their guests at public sessions—to animate the army, and raise the cry of war.

"T' applaud the valiant, and the base controul;

" Diffurb, exalt, enchant the human foul!"

The Brebon, or legislative Bard, not only made and administered the laws, but it was his duty to chaunt them to his harp, as he was seated on an eminence in the open air.

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the Reader is indebted for most of the following particulars which respect the Bards.

(a) Walker's Hift. Mem. of Irish Bards, P. 1; to which elegant and learned work

The Seanacha was antiquarian, genealogist, and historian. He recorded remarkable events, and preserved the genealogy of his patron.

Beside the above, there was an inferior order, called Oirfidigh, or instrumental performers; who were further distinguished by the in-

struments on which they played.

The Cacine, or Funeral Song, was a folemn ceremony which accompanied the interment of their chiefs. On this occasion, the officiating Druid having performed the religious rites, and the pedigree of the deceased having been recited by his Seanacha, the proper Bard sang the Cacine, which he accompanied with his harp; being assisted by a chorus of inferior Bards and ministrels, and sometimes a company of women.

The following extract from one of these Elegies, composed on the death of Cuchullin, may give an idea of the natural sublimity of these compositions, and will not, it is presumed, be unacceptable to readers

of tafte and fenfibility.

"By the dark rolling waves of Lego, they raised the hero's tomb.

Luath at a distance lies, the companion of Cuchullin at the chace—
Blest be thy soul, son of Semo; thou wert mighty in battle:—Thy
strength was like the strength of a stream; thy speed like the eagle's
wing.—Thy path in the battle was terrible: the steps of death were
behind thy sword—Blest be thy soul, son of Semo: car-borne chief of
Dunscaiack!

"Thou hast not fallen by the sword of the mighty; neither was thy blood on the spear of the valiant.—The arrow came like the sting of death in a blast: nor did the seeble hand which drew the bow perceive it—Peace to thy soul in thy cave, chief of the Isle of Mist!" (b)

On the establishment of Christianity, the Druids of course vanished, but the Bards remained; and some of them, being converted, sung hymns to the honour of God and his faints. One of these, at least, (Feach) was made a bishop by St. Patrick, in the fifth century, and several others of them commenced clergymen. From this time Music greatly sourcished in the Irish churches, insomuch that in the tenth century, the abbey of Mungret, near Limerick, out of 1500 religious, had

500 choristers. (c) About this time the clergy introduced the accentual characters of the Romish church, the Irish not appearing to have had any method of musical notation of their own.

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Formerly great part of the Irish music was military, and every chief had his peculiar War Cry*. It has been also supposed that the various invasions to which these people were subject, first gave a melancholic tincture to their Music, and introduced among them the minor mode. This arises, however, from an idea that the Music of all countries was originally major; an hypothesis that will admit of debate; and it is to be added, that solitude, and various other circumstances, might

produce the same effects.

The ancient Musical Instruments of the Irish have furnished matter of curious enquiry. (d) The principal were the Harp and Bagpipe. Of the former they had four varieties, differing in fize, form, and number of strings. Indeed, this feems to have been the favourite instrument of many northern nations, and has been supposed to have originated among them. The Irish probably had it from the Milesians, and conveyed it to the Highlanders and Welsh. But it was also well known in the East. Mr. Bruce describes the painting of several he met with in the ruins of ancient Thebes: But we know, from better authority, that it was at a very early period the favourite of the Hebrews. The Ragpipe, indeed, was probably a northern instrument, yet not exclusively to; fince we find an infrument of this kind among the Greeks, Chinefe. and several other nations. Of this instrument there are also varieties: the large War Bagpipe is peculiar to the Highlanders, and well calculated to animate their warlike and ferocious temper: but the Irish Bagpipe is smaller, blown by the mouth, and capable of great sweetness and expression.

Among the vocal Music of the Irish a stranger would not expect much excellency, on account of the apparent harshness of the language: There are not wanting, however, advocates for this; who aftert, (strange as it may seem) that the Irish is more musical than even the

Italian, or any other European language (e)

The stile of the ancient Irish Music is said by their early writers to

⁽b) Machbers n's Death of Cuchullin.

⁽d) Walker's Irish Bards, P. 69, and seq. Also, Appendix, No. I, and VIII.

(e) Ibid. P. 65.

* See No. CIV. in the following Collection.

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have been enharmonic. If fo, it must be in the same sense that Dr. Burney explains the term in relation to the Old Enharmonic of the Greeks; i. e. without Semitones. (f)

from the Music of every other nation by an infinuating sweetness, which forces its way irresistably to the heart." (g) Abating something for national partiality, a great degree of excellence must be allowed to the plaintive airs, and a wonderful glee and vivacity to the jigs.

We have hinted, on a former occasion, that the Scots probably derived a great part of their Music from the Irish; (h) and there is reason to think the Welsh were indebted to the same masters.

But to return to our Narrative.—At the revival of literature, the Bards were reduced to two classes; viz. Historians and Rhapsodists; from which last the modern Bards were derived. One of these, O'Carrol, slourished with a school of pupils, in the year 1340.

Our Henry VIII. in compliment to the musical fame of Ireland, gave them a harp for their arms, and James I. quartered it with those of France and England.

Several famous Bards flourished in the reign of Elizabeth: But as we know not that any of their Music is preserved, it would afford little entertainment to recite their names.

The prefent century has produced some eminent Bards.—Cormac Common, (i) (or Cormac Dall; i. e. Blind Cormac) was born May 1703, in the county of Mayo, of poor parents, and within the first year had the missortune to lose his fight by the small-pox. He is celebrated for being the last of the Tale-Tellers; and recited his melancholy narrative much in the manner of cathedral chaunting. He was a poet, a harper, and, when young, a fine singer; and was lately, at the age of more than sour-score, living near Dunmore, in the county of Galway.

But the most eminent of all the modern Bards was the famous Carolan, author of a great part of the tunes in the following collection; who therefore claims our particular attention.

(f) History of Music, Vol. I. P. 497.

(g) Walker's Irish Bards, P. 65.

(b) Essay on the Scots Music, prefixed to the Caledonian Muse, P. 2.

TURLOUGH O'CAROLAN (k) was born at Nobber, in the county of Westmeath, A.D. 1670, on a spot denominated from his ancestors, though it has been several ages in other hands. The small-pox, at a very early period, deprived him of his eye-sight, and

" Knowledge at one entrance quite shut out."

But Providence, as in many fimilar instances, in some degree compensated for this loss, by bestowing on him a fine ear and taste for Music. So that, as himself used quaintly to express it, his eyes were transplanted into his ears.

Our Bard discovered early marks of a musical genius, and at twelve years old he had an instructor for the harp; but, (as often happens) his diligence not keeping pace with his genius, he never excelled as an instrumental performer, and seldom used his instrument but in extempore effusions, or as an accompanyment to his voice; and even

this office was frequently supplied by a domestic.

Blindness is no certain defence against love. Carolan found this; for pretty early in life he became enamoured with a Miss Bridget Cruise, which is said to have first tuned his harp to love, though, in this instance, his love was unsuccessful. An incident with reference to this Lady is related, which shews that the loss of one sense may be the perfection of several others. Our Bard's blindness was not only compensated by an ear nicely tuned to harmony, but by an exquisite sensibility in seeling. In a subsequent part of life, being induced by the superstition of that religion in which he had been educated, and to which he always tenaciously adhered, he made a pilgrimage to a celebrated cave, called St. Patrick's Purgatory, situated on an island in the county of Donegal.—Handing some other pilgrims into the bout, he chanced to take the hand of the above Lady, and instantly exclaimed, "This is the hand of Bridget Cruise;" a circumstance that awakened in full vigour the recollection of his early attachment.

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Carolan's want of success with the first object of his attachment, did

(i) Wa'ker's Irish Bards, Appendix, No. V.

(k) Ibid, No. VI.

not cool his passion for the fair fex, and the loss of Miss Cruise was supplied in the embraces of a Miss Mary Macguire; a young Lady of good family, though not remarkable for meekness or occonomy. At this time, it is supposed, he took a small farm near Moshill, in the county of Leitrim, and erected a little house, where himself and lady enjoyed themselves, and entertained their friends; till, in the sequel, they discovered that neither his genius nor her beauty were sufficient to keep open doors, or supply their table even with the necessaries, and

much less the luxuries of life.

This was probably one circumstance that induced Carolan to commence itinerant Bard, and exhibit a genuine representation of Homer's Demodocus. He traversed the country on his own horse, attended by a domestic Harper. The doors of the Nobility and Gentry were every where thrown open for his entertainment. He scorned to compose for hire; but his constant custom was to reward his benefactor with a song, made on himself, or a principal branch of the samily: Some of the most celebrated of these (and distinguished by the name of the subject) were composed on — Jones, Esq. of Money Glass, in the county of Leitrim—J. Nugent, Esq. of Castle Nugent, Culambre, and his sair sister, Miss Grace Nugent—all which will be found in the following collection. (1)

The occasion of several other of his compositions is remarkable.—Tradition says, that O'Rourke, a powerful and turbulent Irish chiestain, was invited by the politic Elizabeth, queen of England, on a visit to her court. Before he left his native country, he assembled all his vassals and neighbours, and gave them a sumptuous treat at his casse. This event Mr. Mac Gauran, a gentleman of Leitrim, who possessed a happy talent at ludicrous poetry, made the subject of a song, (m) which Carolan, his contemporary and friend, set to Music; and Plaracana Ruarcach, or O'Rourke's Feast, is left a monument to their

, joint memory. (n)

A Miss Fetherston, a Protestant lady of the county of Longford, going

(1) See in the following Collection, Numbers I. XI L. I.

(m) A translation of this fong was made by Dean Swift, and is to be found in his Works.

to church one Sunday, met with Carolan going to mass. She gave him an invitation to her house; but the Bard, with his usual gallantry, excused himself from a pretended terror of her wit. At parting, she requested his prayers, but he protested she was the object of his devotion; and accordingly, instead of praying, composed the song which he called

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Carolan's Devotion. (0)

Carolan, unhappily for his health and character, was immoderately given to whiskey, and always treated his Muse with a glass when he invoked her. Once, at the earnest remonstrance of his medical friends, he refrained six weeks from his favourite liquor, during which his usual gaiety and genius forsook him. At length, unable to contain any longer, he procured a glass of it to smell to. Immediately as the sumes reached his head, his countenance brightened—his vivacity rekindled—and he could no longer result the bewitching draught. Before morning he composed the charming song of Carolan's Receipt. (p)

As to treat the Bard was a certain method of infpiring his Muse; so to deny the exhilarating draught was equally sure to attract his fatire. One O'Flynn, the careful butler of a certain parsimonious lady, whom he then visited, once refusing him admittance to his cellar, procured himself a severe epigram, of which the following is a translation:

" What pity Hell's gates are not kept by O'Flynn!

" So furly a dog would let nobody in."

The ancient Bards, we have observed, often pretended to prophecy; and that our Bard might not be thought inferior to any of them, the following story is related of him:—Having often tried to compose a plangsty for a Miss Brett, of the county of Slingo, but never to his satisfaction, he one day threw away his harp, with this declaration to her mother;—" Some evil Genius (said he) hovers over me; there is not a string in my harp that does not vibrate a melancholy sound—I fear she is not doomed to remain long amongst us: Nay, (said he, emphatically) she will not survive twelve months."—The event is

⁽n) No. VII. (o) No. CVII.

⁽p) No. III. in the following Collection.

She gave him gallantry, exparting, the ref his devotion; which he called

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nded to prophecy; any of them, the ried to compose a but never to his its declaration to wer me; there is nocholy found—I Nay, (faid he, —The event is faid to have verified the prediction; but what inferences are to be drawn from this and fimilar narrations, must be left to the cool investi-

gation of philosophy.

It is reported, that when Geminiani was at Dublin, he had the curiofity to try the genius of Carolan, by procuring a piece of Italian Music to be played to him, excellent in itself, but purposely vitiated in certain places. Carolan was delighted with the Music; but much to the surprise of the hearers, discovered, and even rectified its defects.

At another time, it is faid, meeting with a mufician of fome eminence at the house of an Irish nobleman, he challenged him to a trial of skill. The musician played Vivaldi's fifth concerto on his violin. This finished, Carolan, with wonderful exactness, repeated it on his harp, though he had never before heard it; and, to increase the surprise of his auditory, added another concerto of his own, extemporary, in which he copied the taste of the Italian composer, in a manner quite astonishing.

It has been observed above, that Carolan was a Roman Catholic, and it should be added, that he composed several pieces of Sacred Music, which, with great devotion, he performed in the public service, to the

astonishment of the congregation.

In the year 1733, Carolan lost his beloved Mary Macguire, who had lived faithfully in obscure retirement with her children, while our Irish Orpheus traversed the country. This event threw a gloom upon his mind, and is thought to have hastened his death, which happened in March 1738, at the house of Mrs. Mac Dermot, of Aldersord. Dr. Goldsmith relates, (upon what authority is uncertain) that even in the article of death he called for a draught of his beloved liquor, which being brought at his earnest importunity, he was not able to swallow; but returned it with this unseasonable jest, that it would be hard indeed for two such friends as he and his cup to part without kissing; and then expired. (4)

Carolan was buried in the church-yard of Kilronan, in the diocese

of Ardagh, where his skull was lately observed rudely scattered among the spoils of death, and distinguished from the vulgar multitude by a ribband appended thereto.—A circumstance this, which would have animated the genius of a Yorick to the highest pitch of elegant enthusiasm.

Our Bard was lamented in an humble Elegy, written by his facetious friend and companion, Charles Mac Cabe; but which has no

merit to excite the Reader's curiofity.

Carolan left fix daughters and a fon; the latter taught the Irish harp, and published a collection of his father's pieces; the most favourite of which, with several others therein omitted, will be found in the following Collection, to the number of more than thirty.

The public opinion of Carolan's merit, and the efteem in which he is held by the most eminent Professors, may be inferred from the infertion of so many of his pieces in our modern operas and entertainments.

Before we conclude this Essay, the Reader may expect some information as to the other airs which form this Collection. Many of them indeed are well known, and have long been favourites with the public: but of some others, there are a few particulars too curious to be withheld.

The Dump, or Melancholy Tune, No. II. is faid to have been fung by the Irish women on the field of battle, after a terrible flaughter made by Cromwell's troops, in Ireland.—No. LIV. was composed in the reign of Henry VIII. the original words being in honour of the ancient Irish dress.—No. XCI. is commonly sung by the Irish Rustics, at the plough.—No. IX. XXIX. and several others, are remarkable for their high antiquity, as well as beautiful simplicity.

It need only be added, that great pains have been taken to make the basses as familiar and pleasing as circumstances would admit. Several of the airs have never appeared with any accompaniment before, and many of them would not admit a strict conformity to modern rules. This may be proper to be observed, that the Editor may not be condemned for violating rules which could not be conformed to with propriety; and to which no experienced Musician would attempt to reduce airs composed before the laws of Harmony were known.

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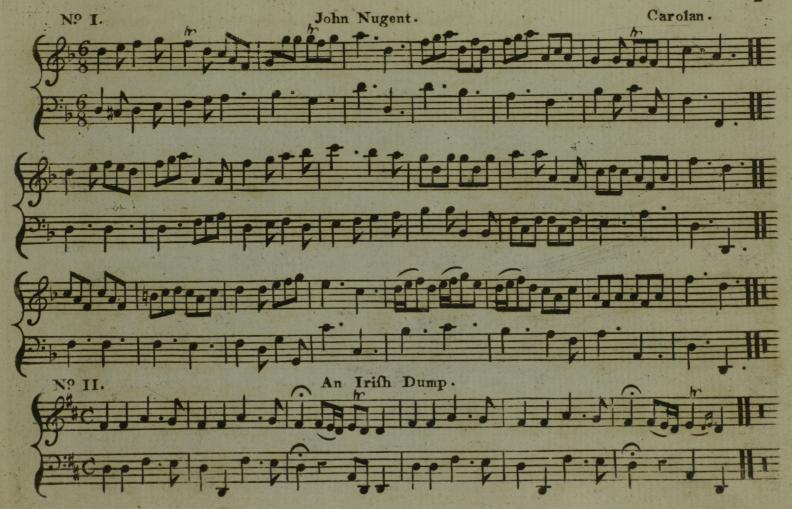
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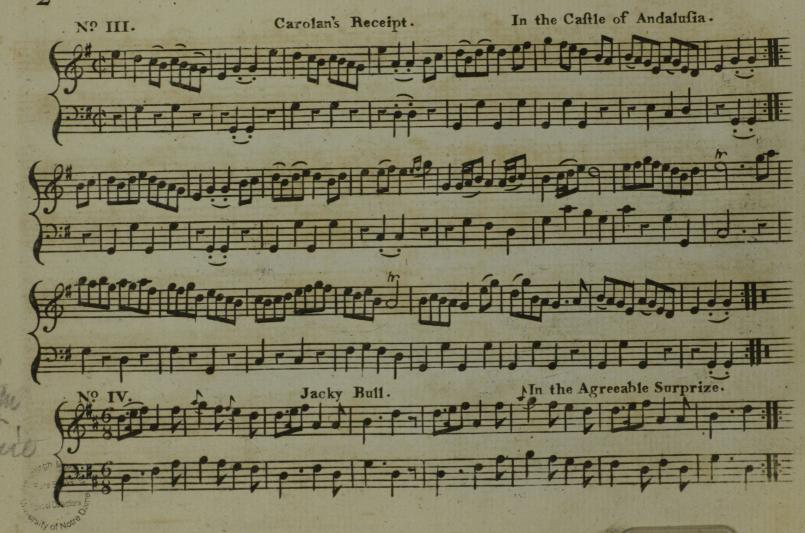
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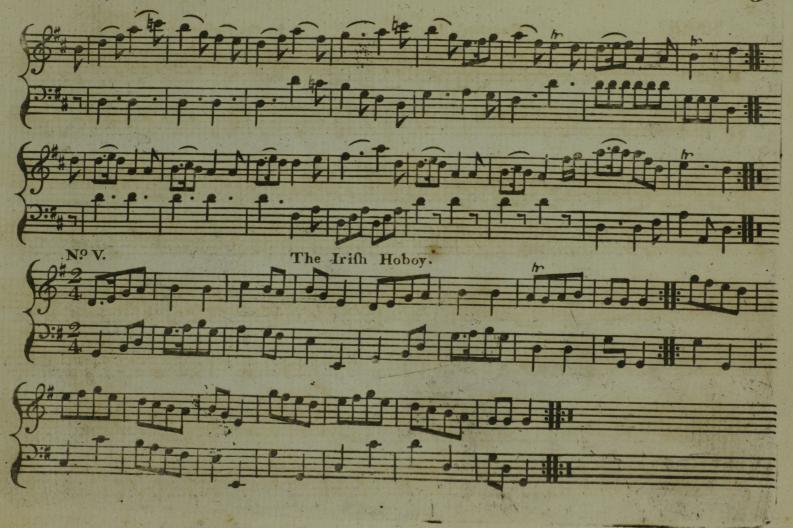




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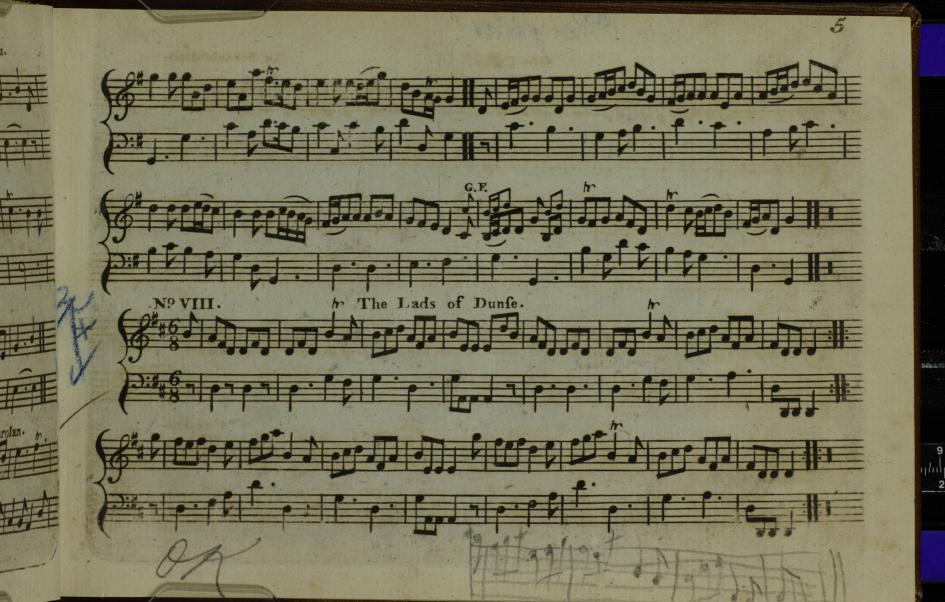


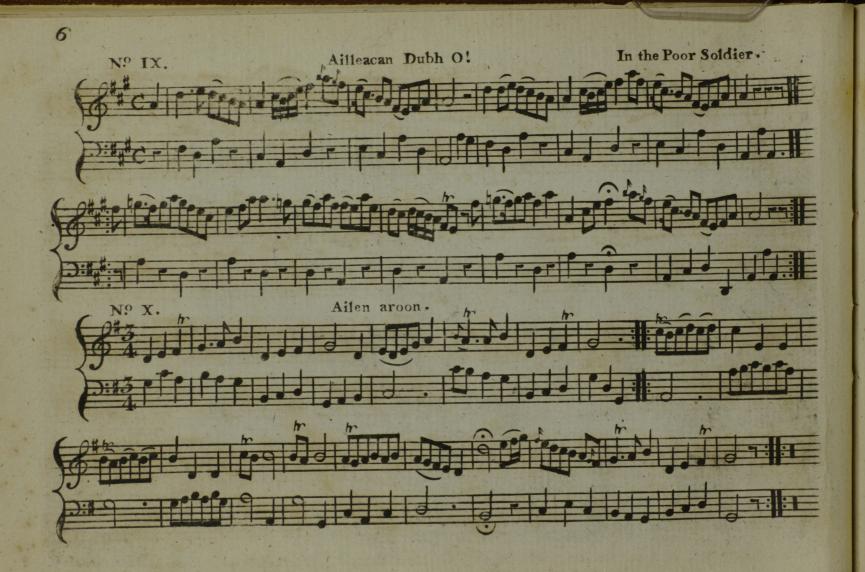


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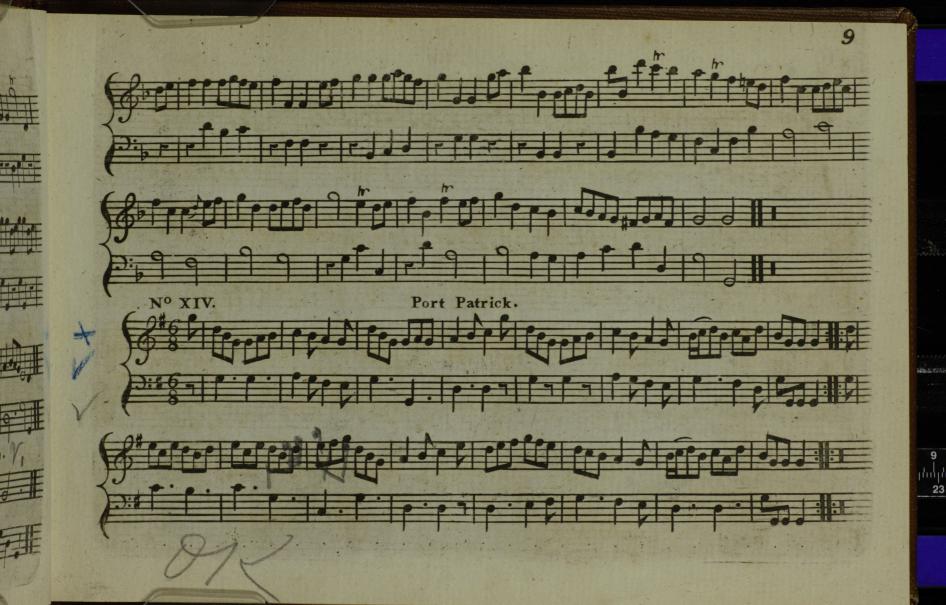


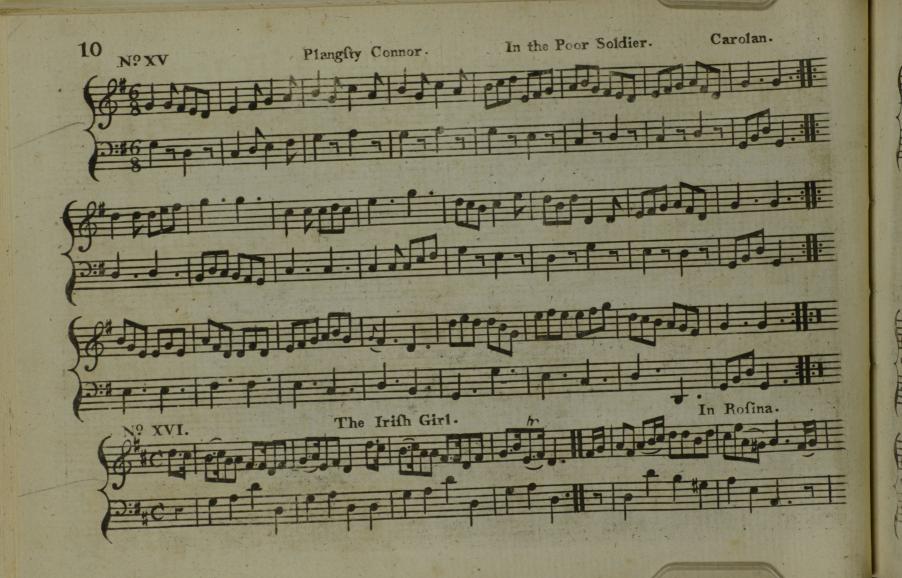


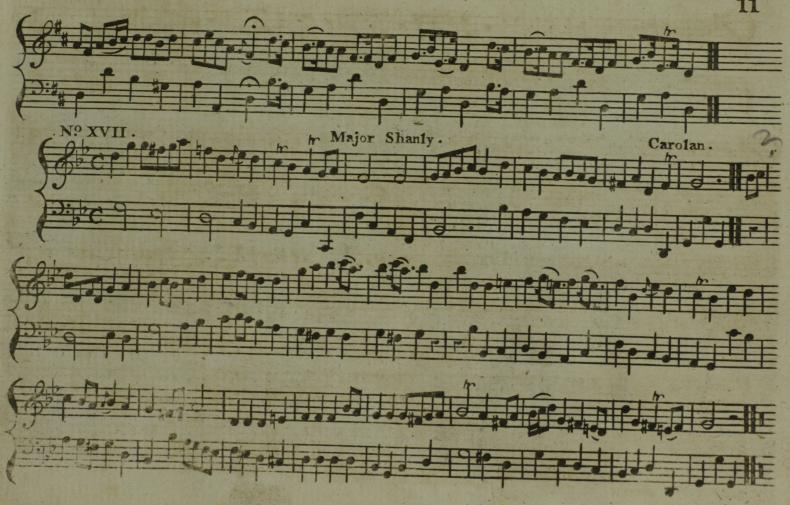


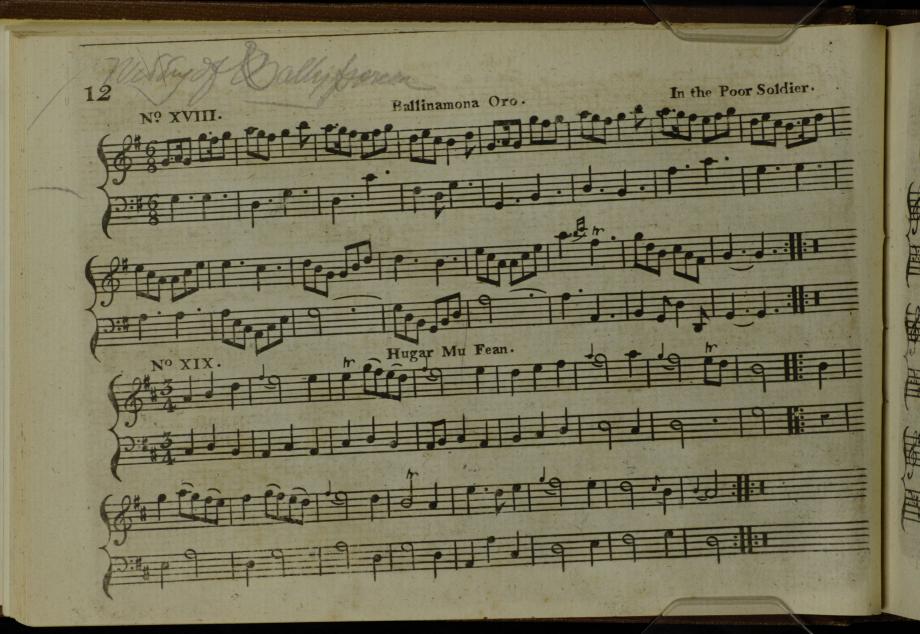
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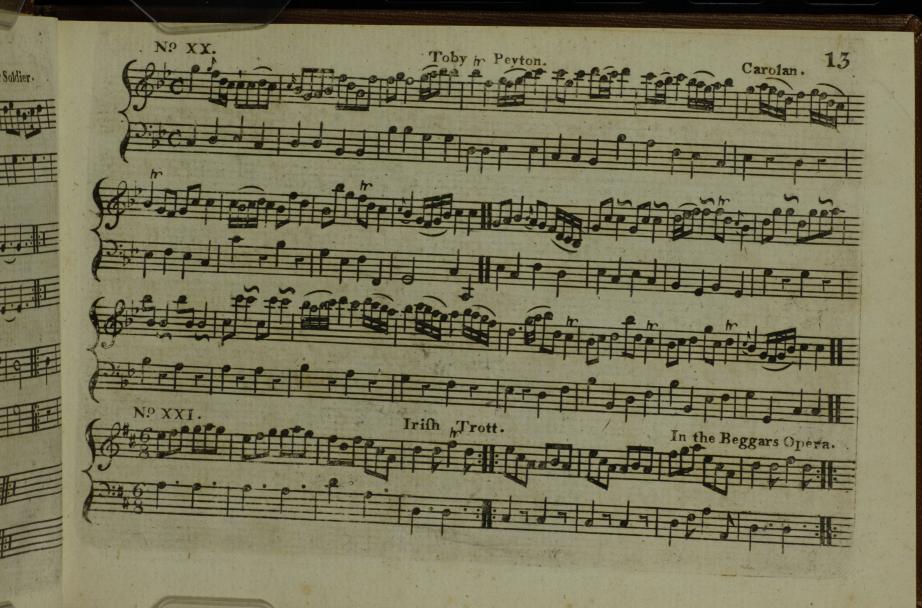
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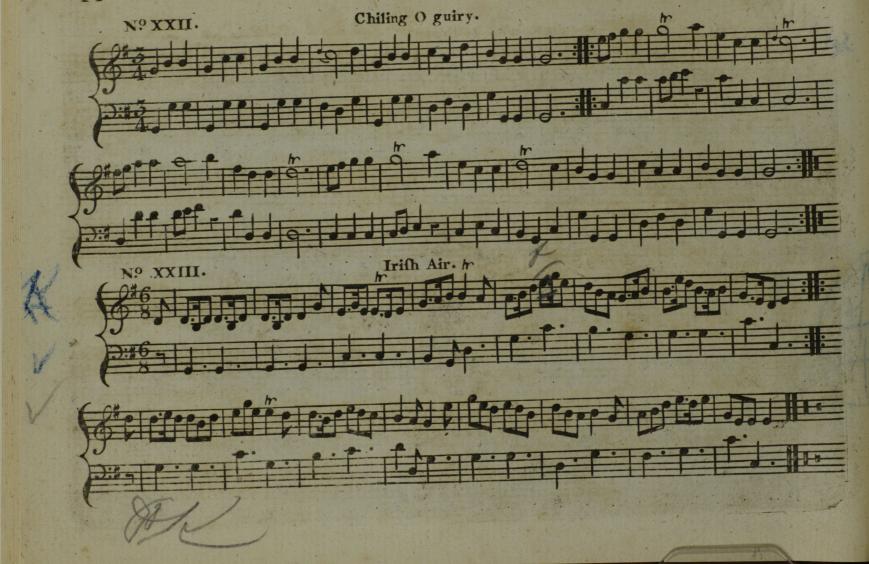


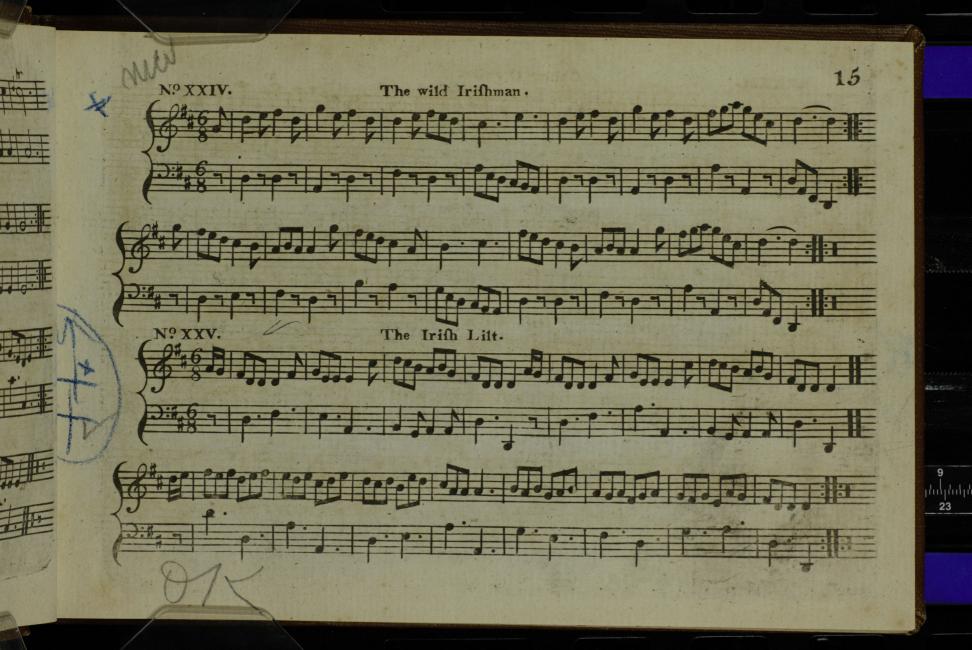




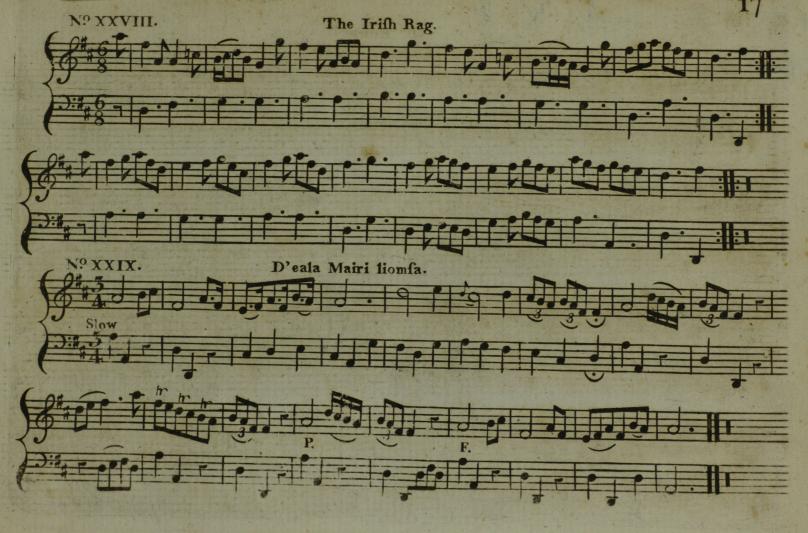
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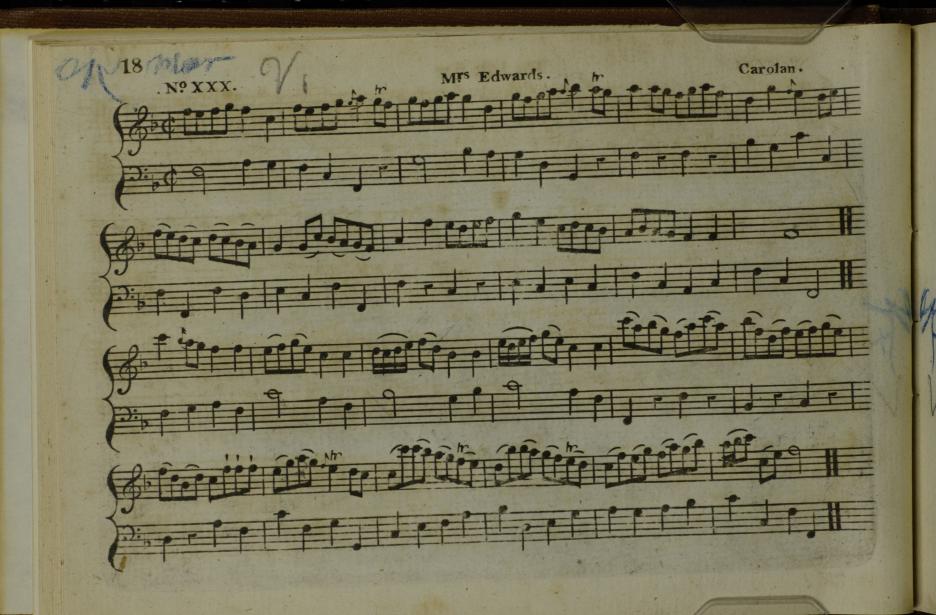
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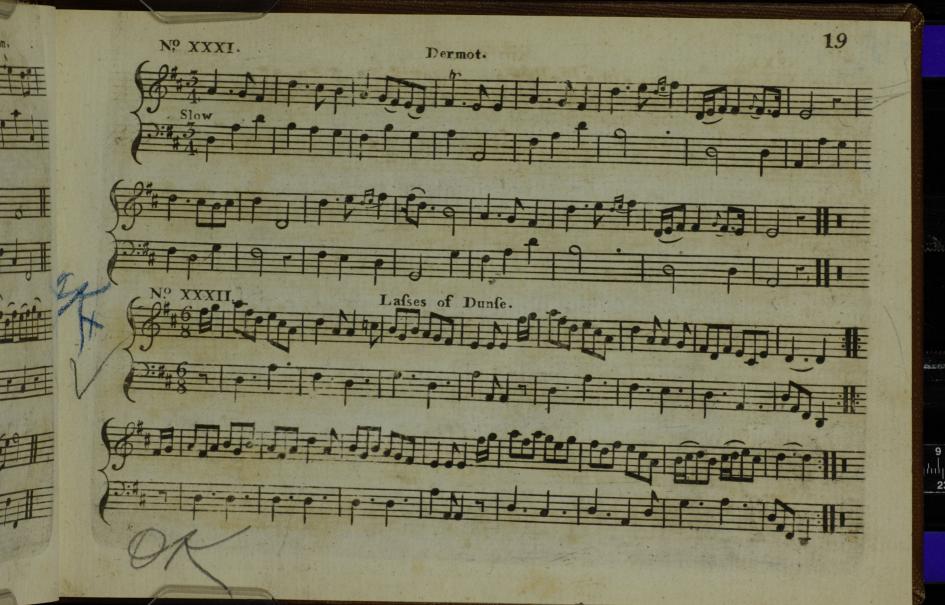


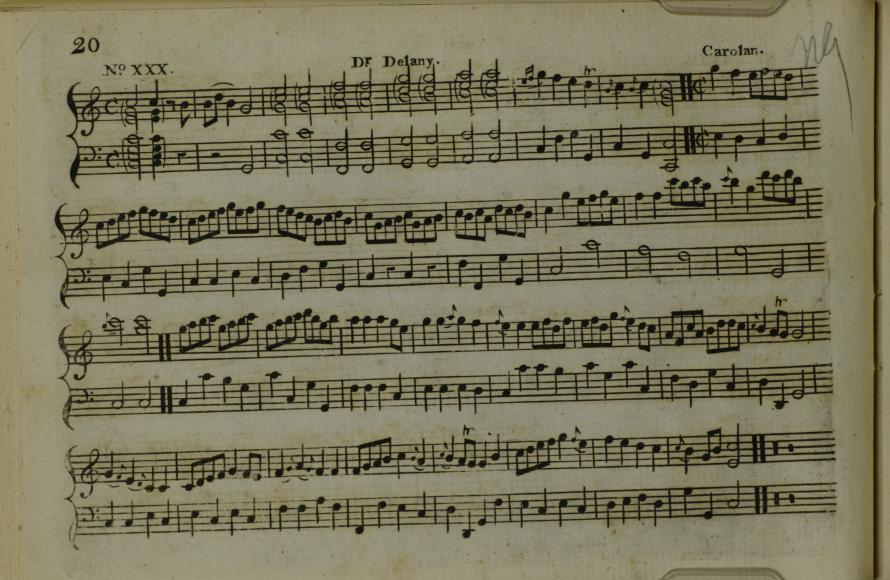


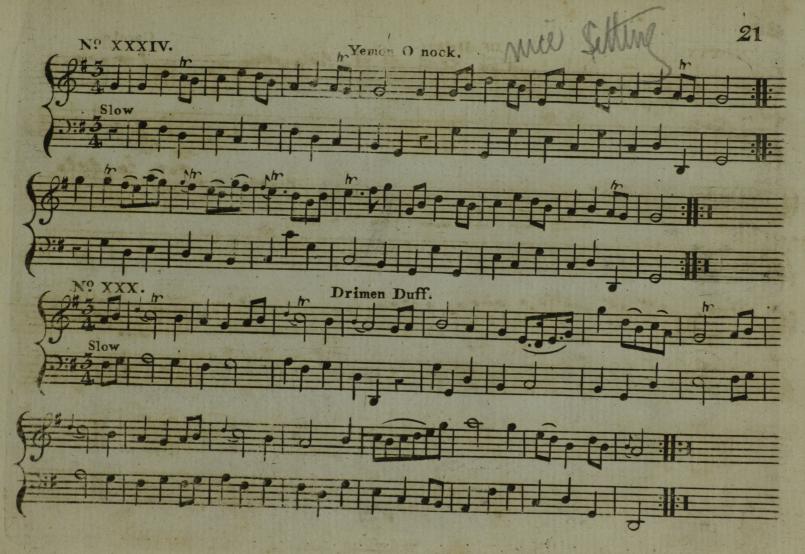
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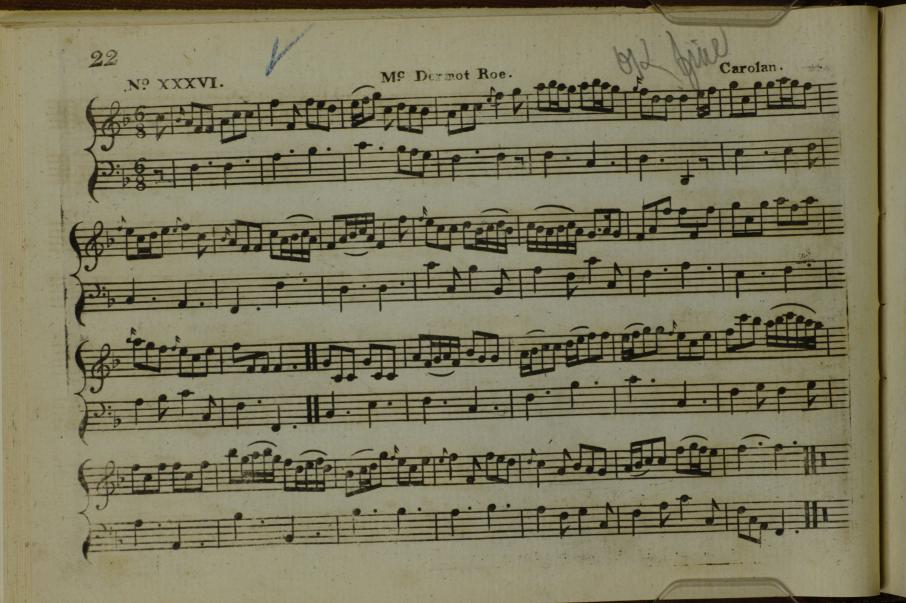


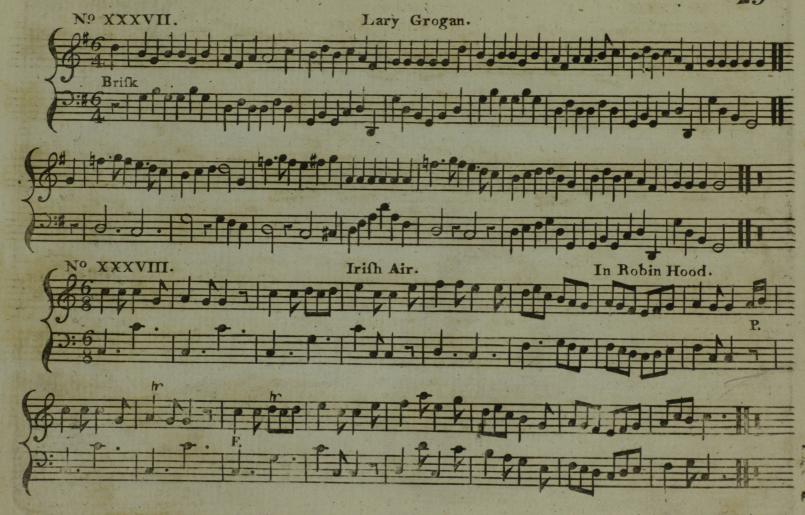




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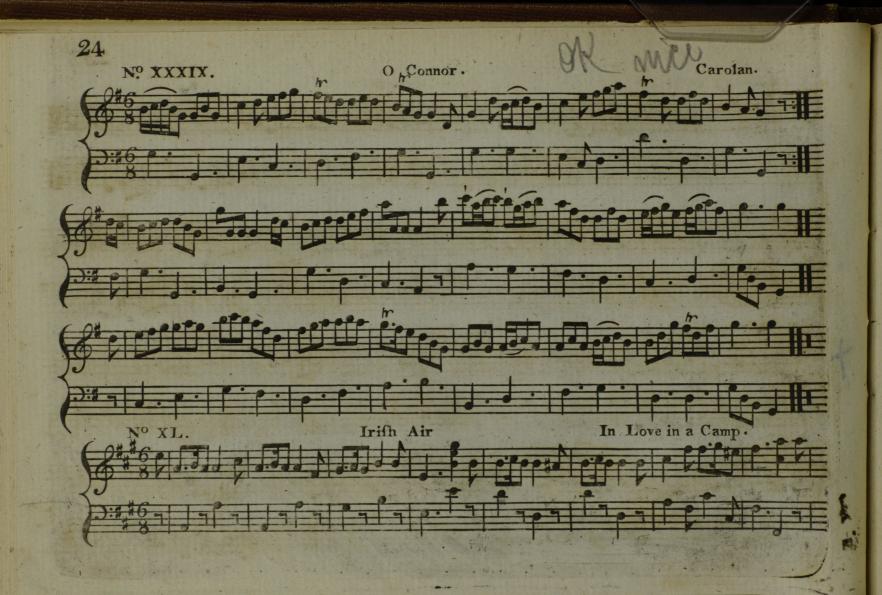


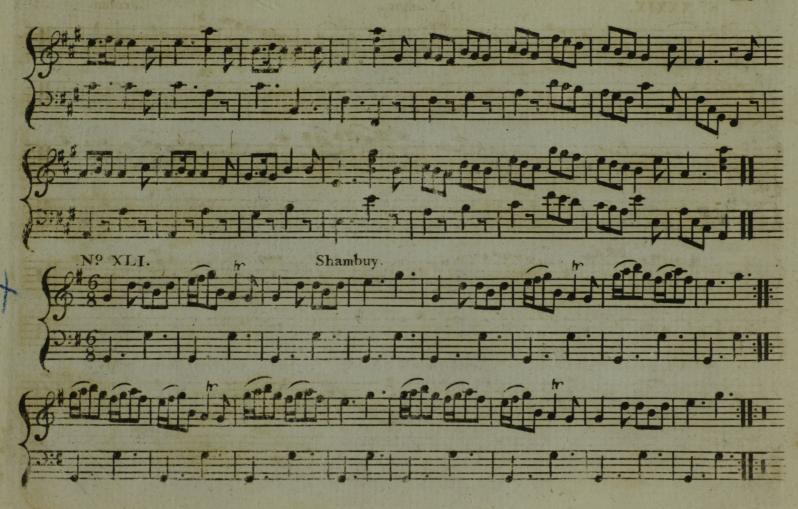
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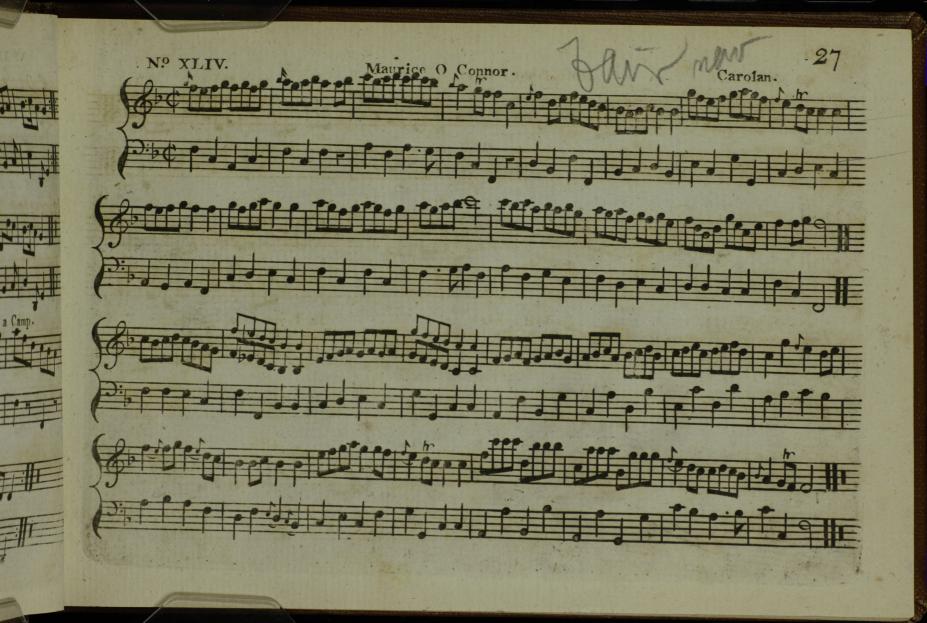


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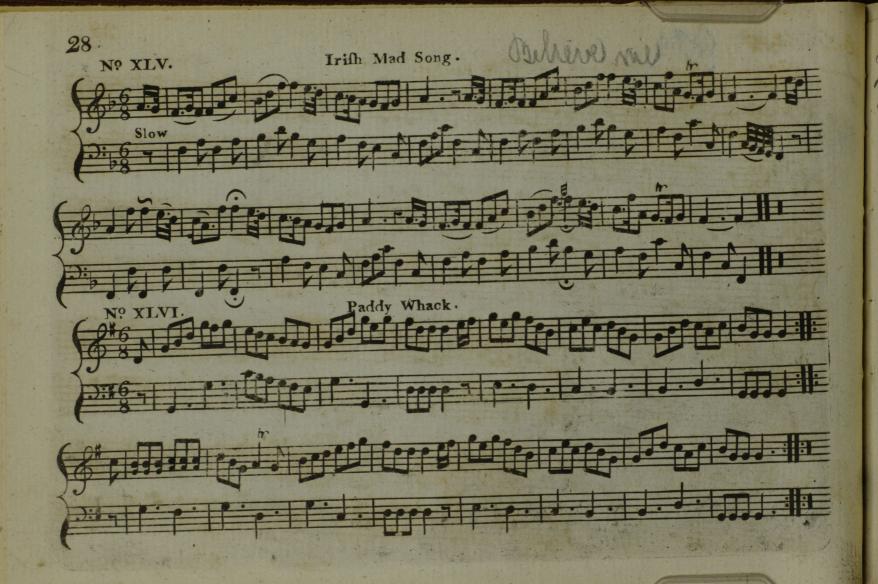
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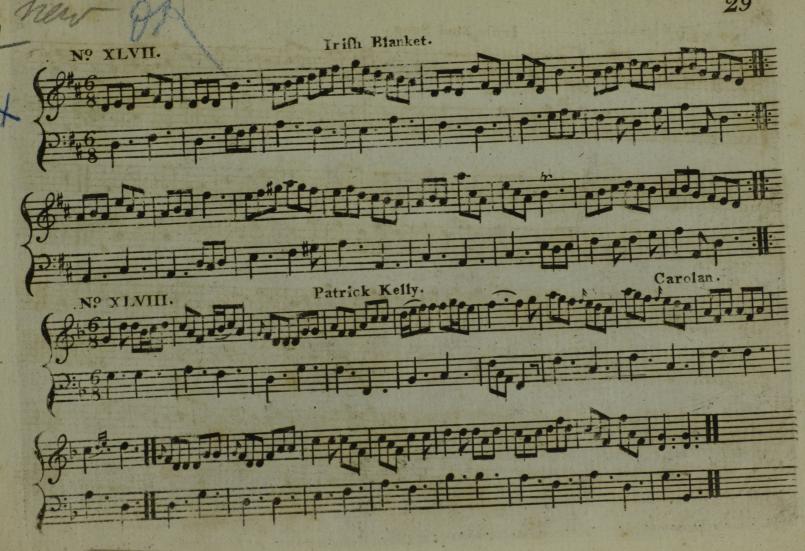
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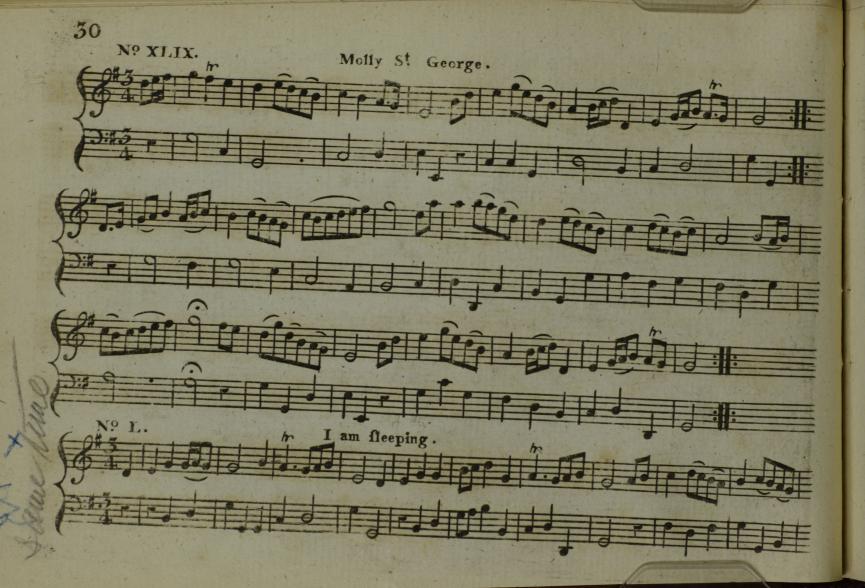


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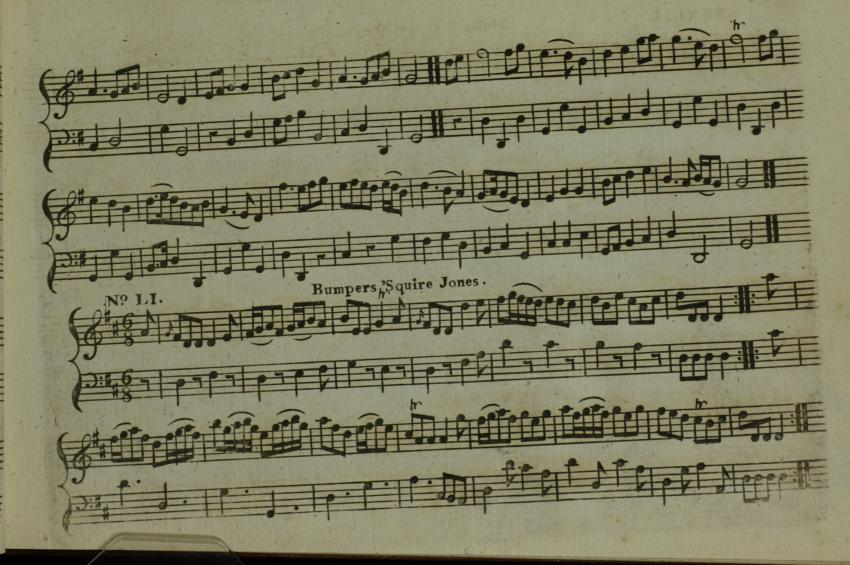


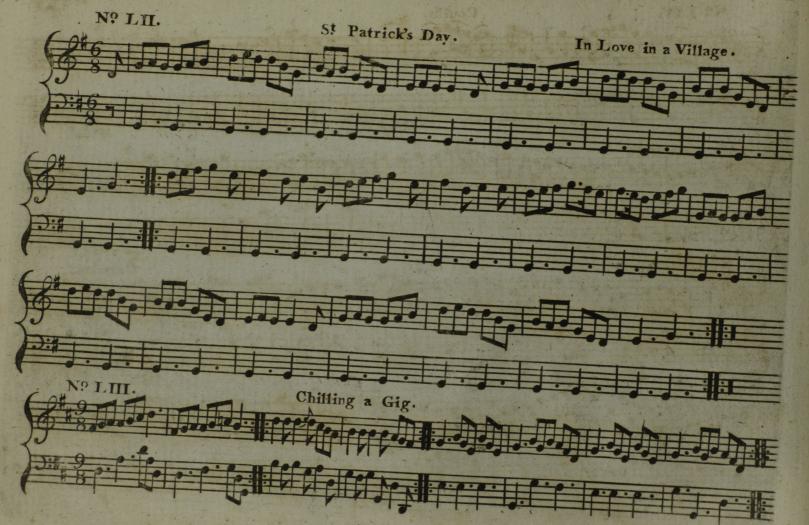
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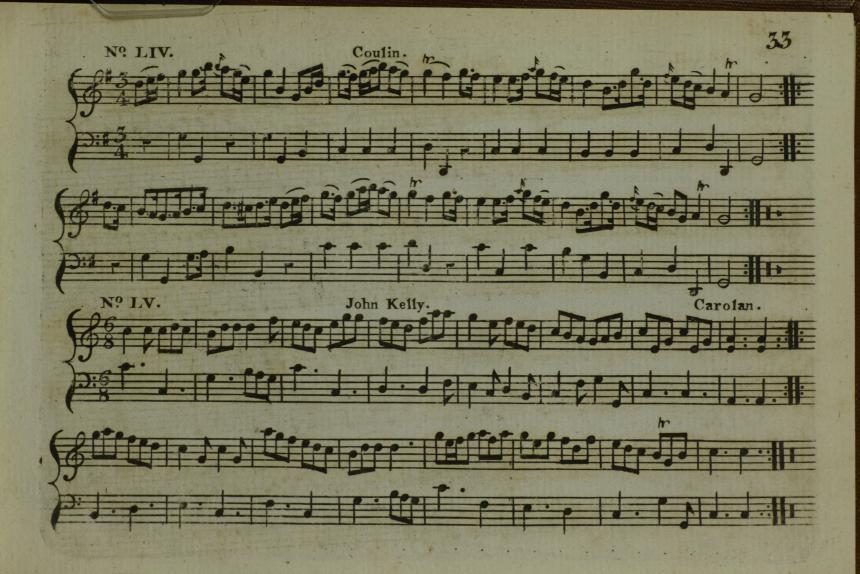
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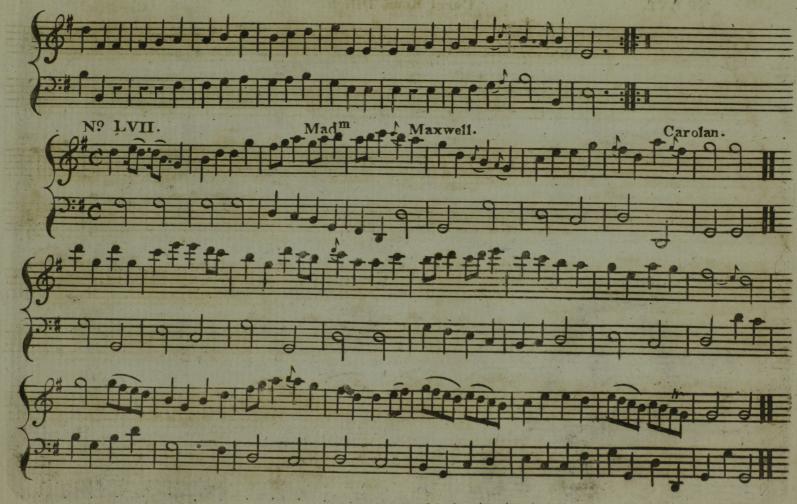
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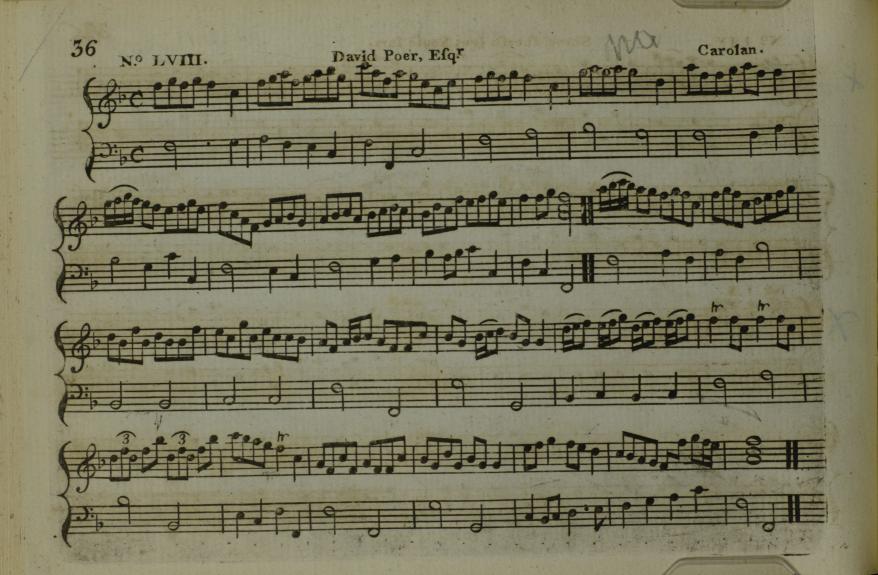


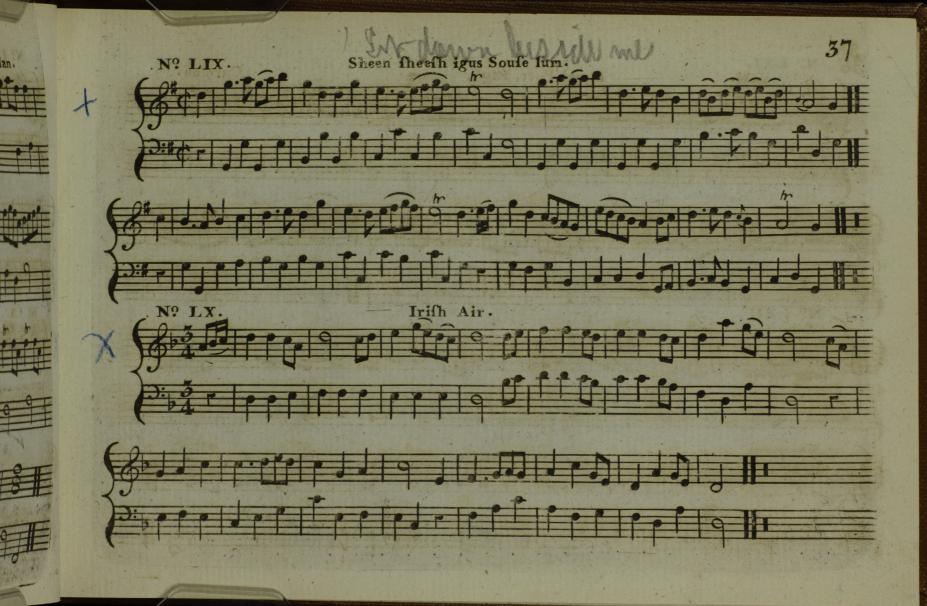


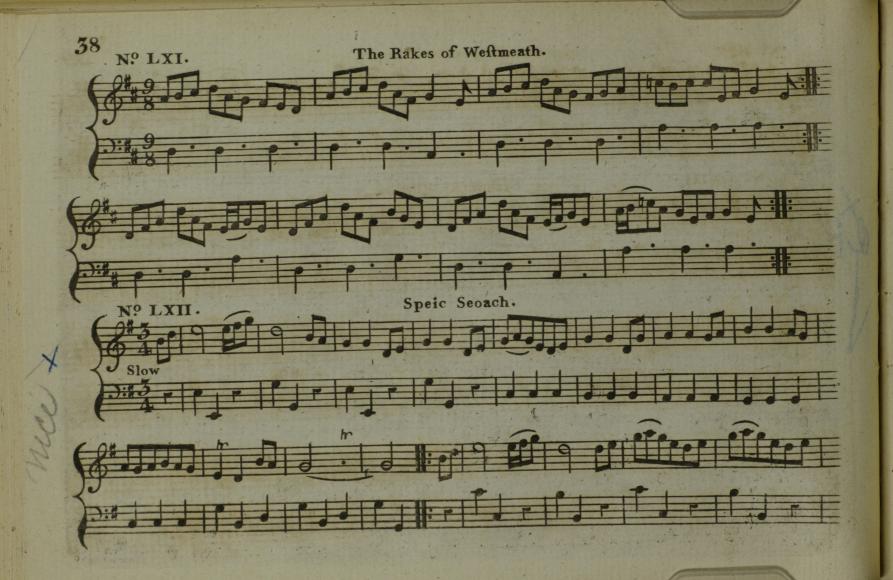


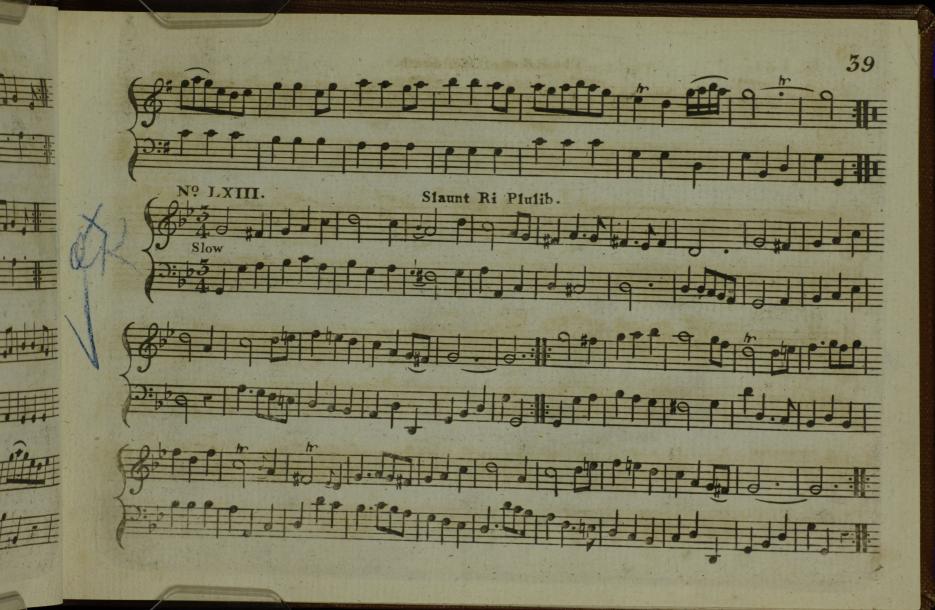






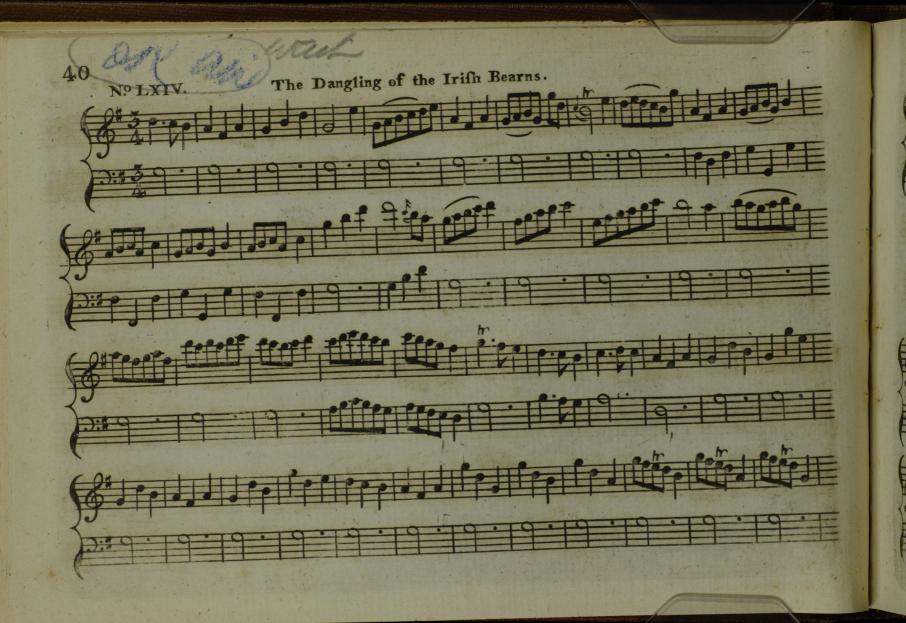






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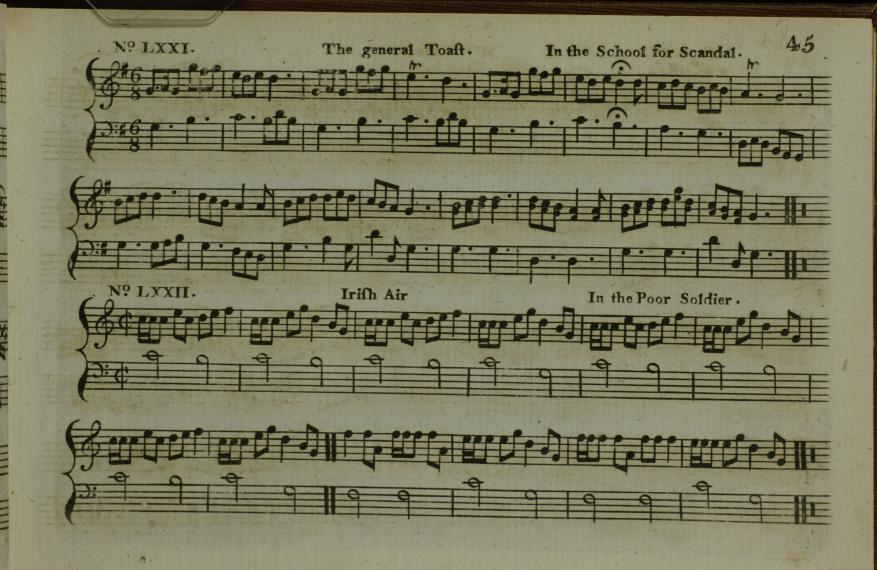
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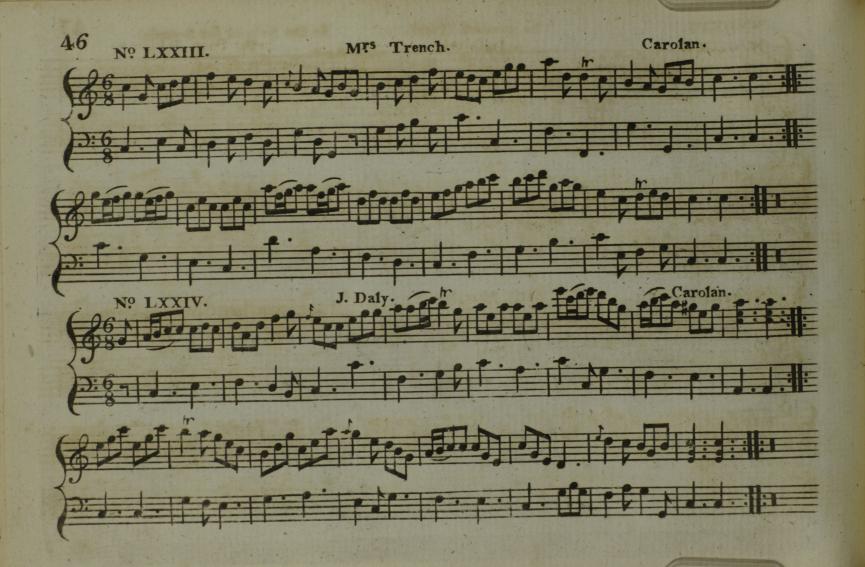


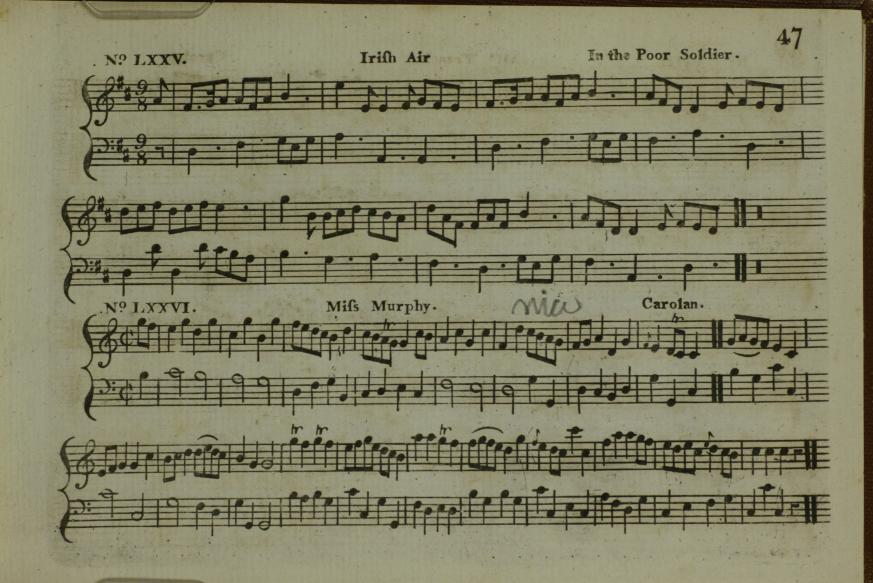


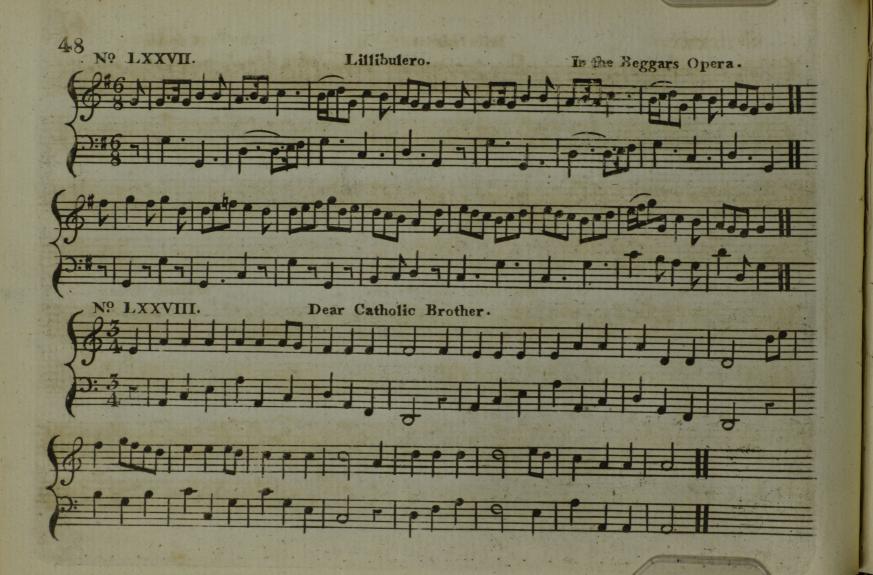
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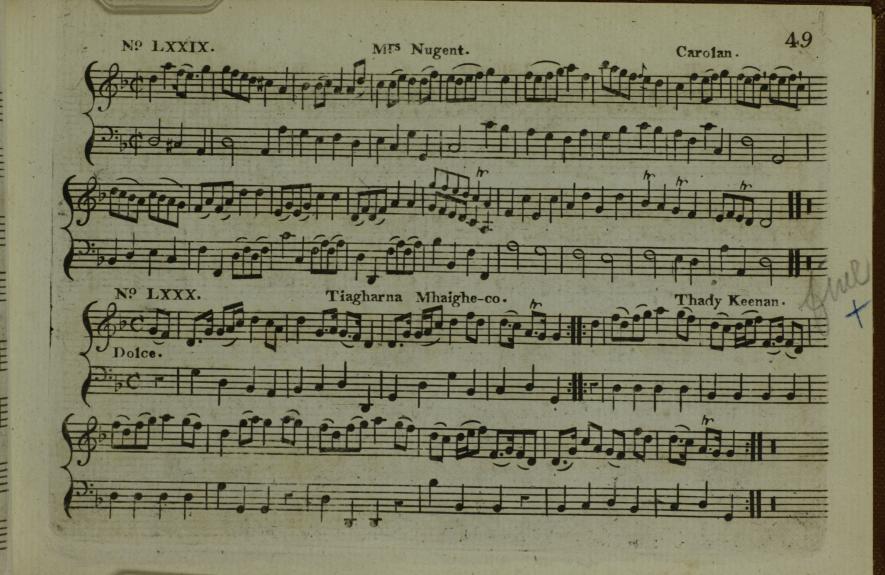


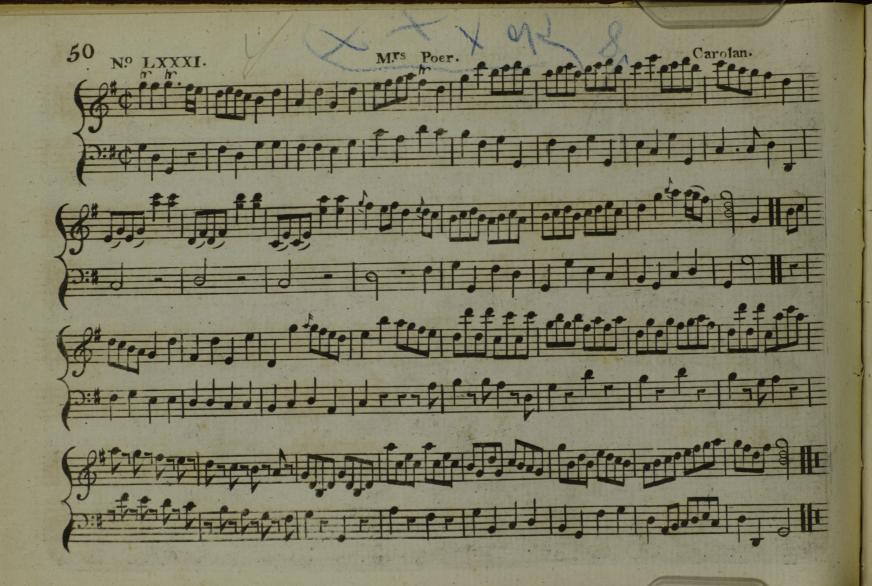




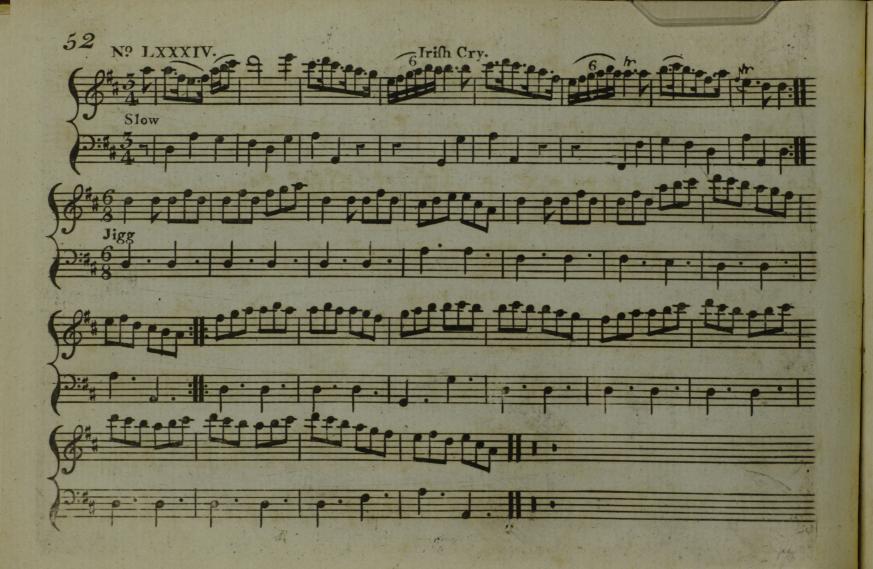


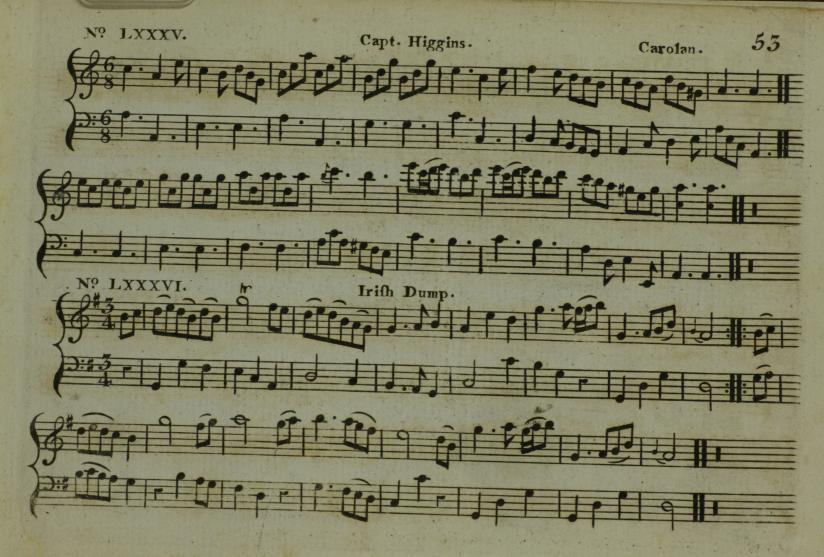




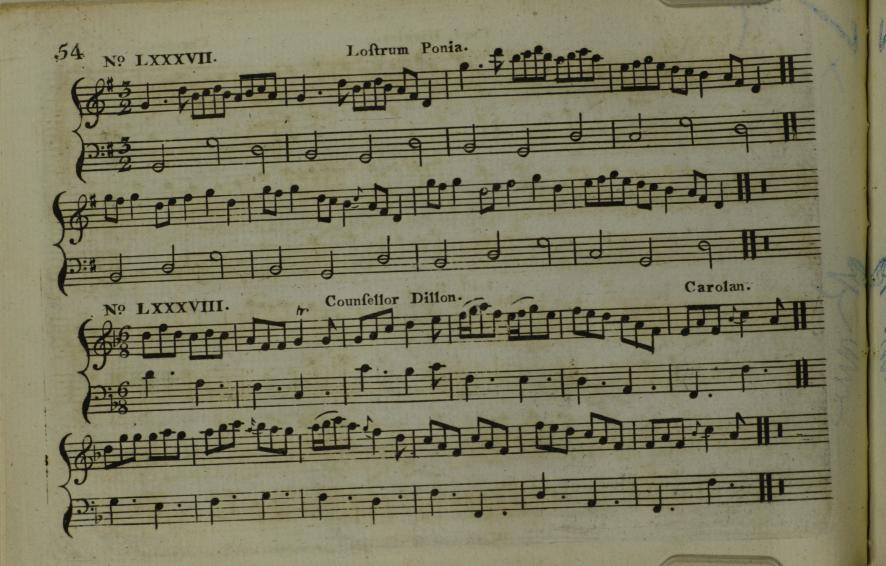


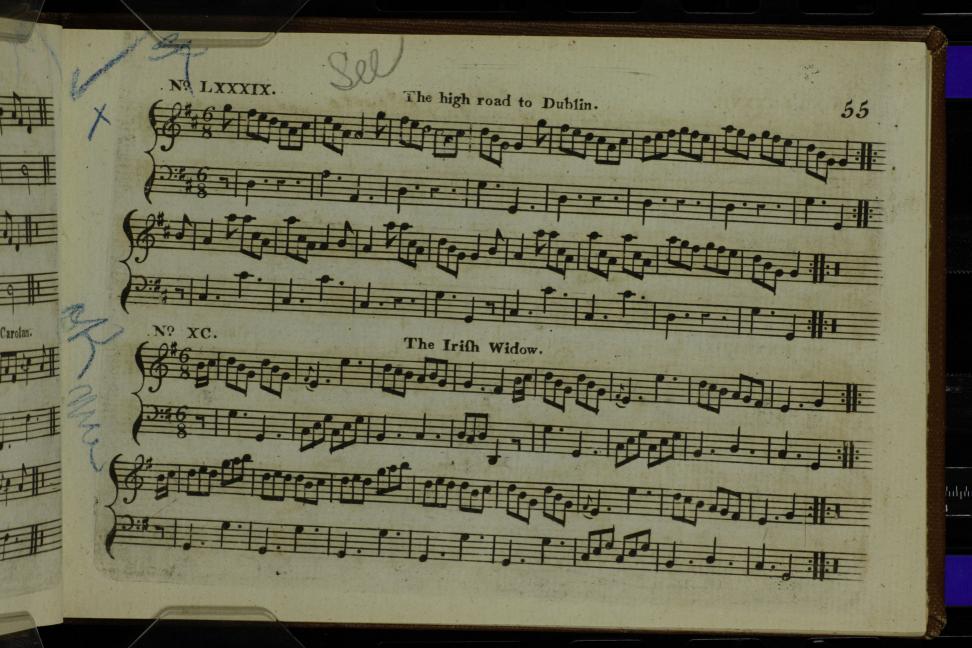


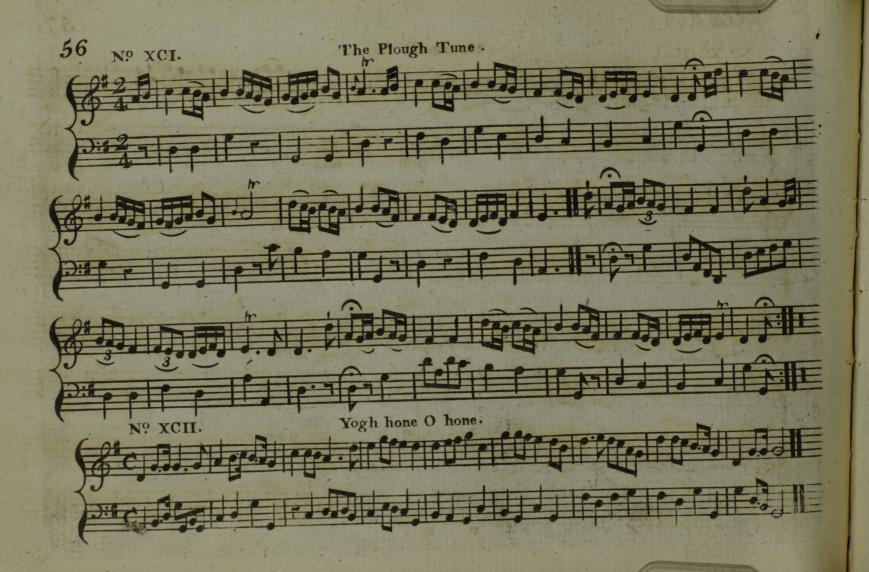


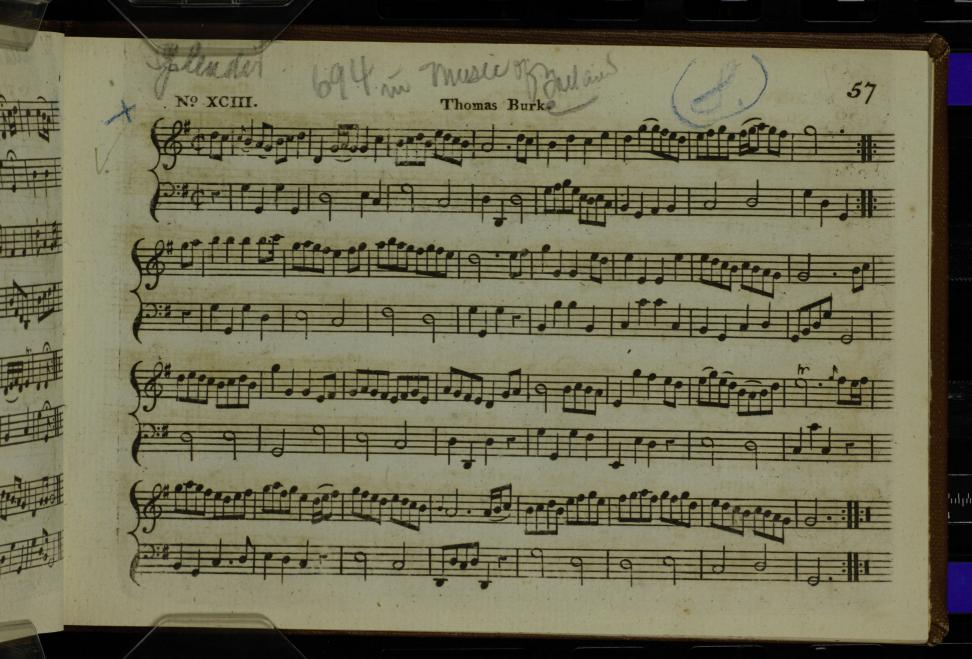


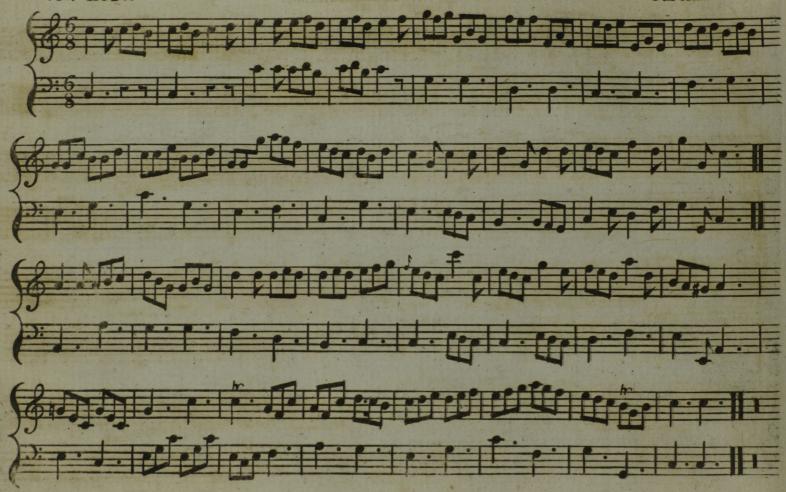
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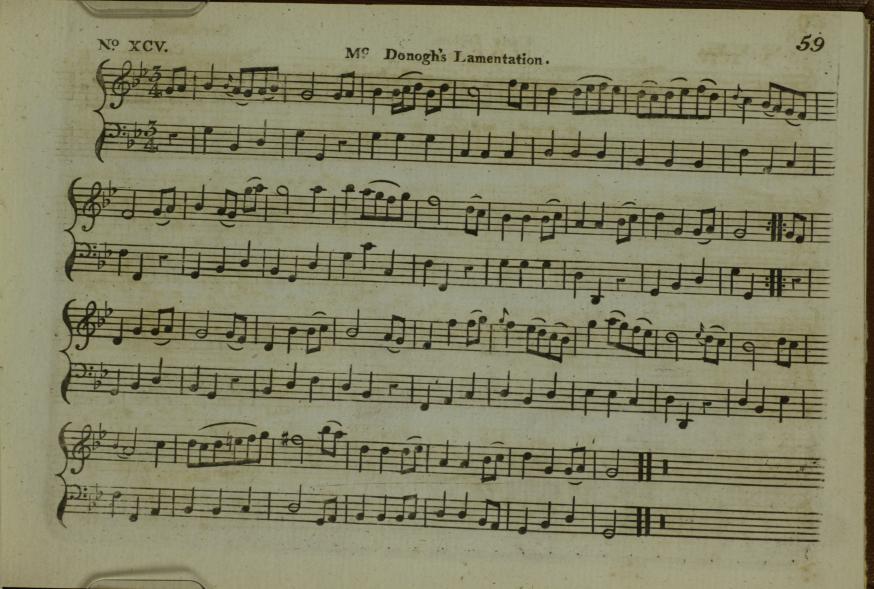








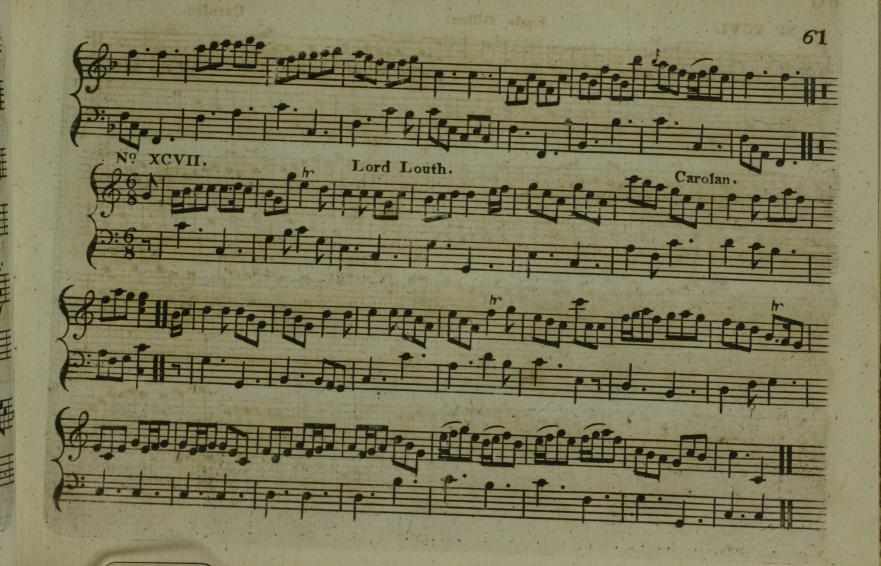


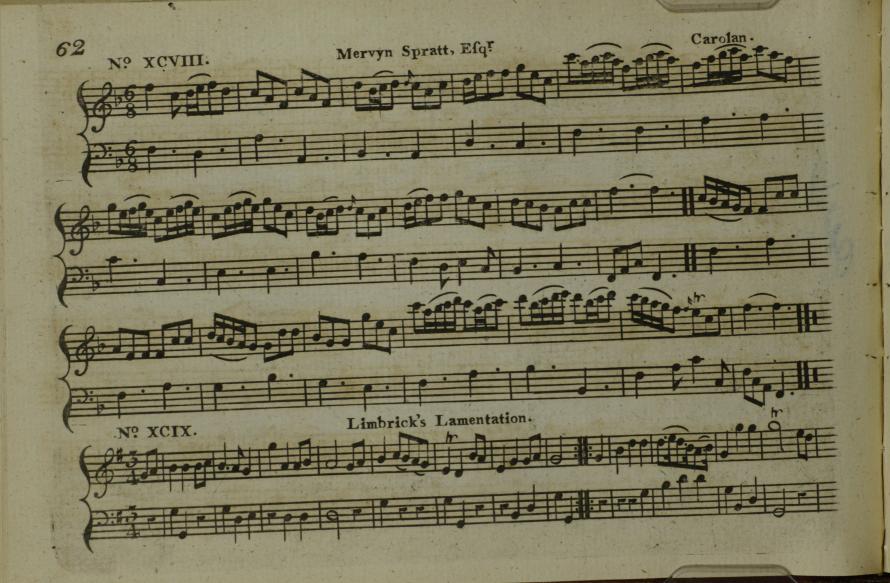


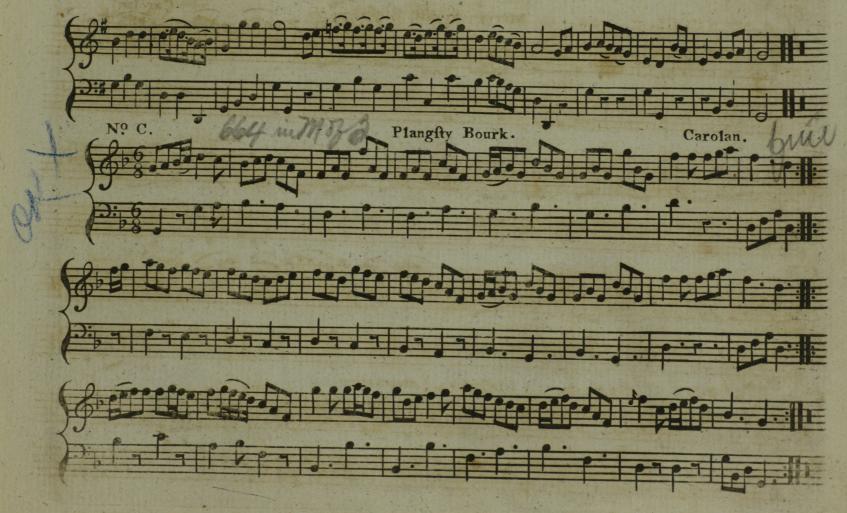
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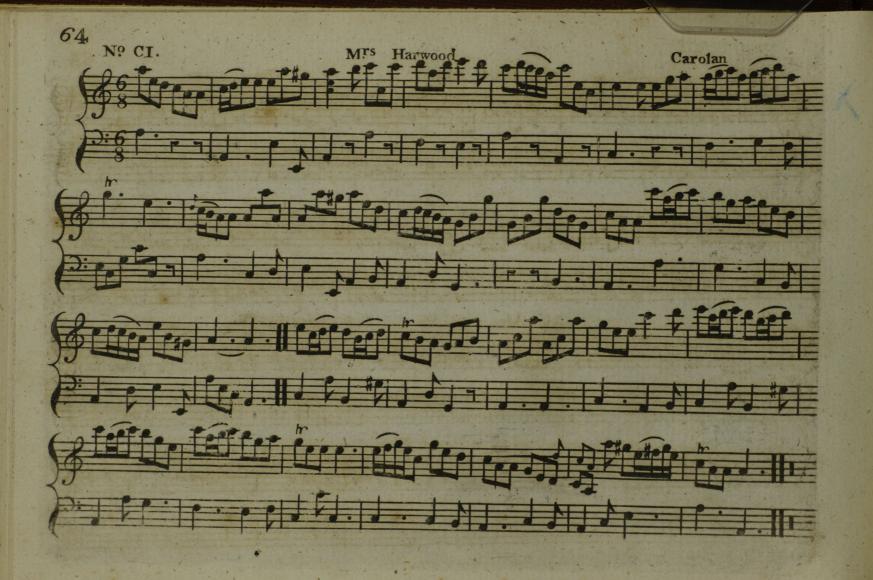
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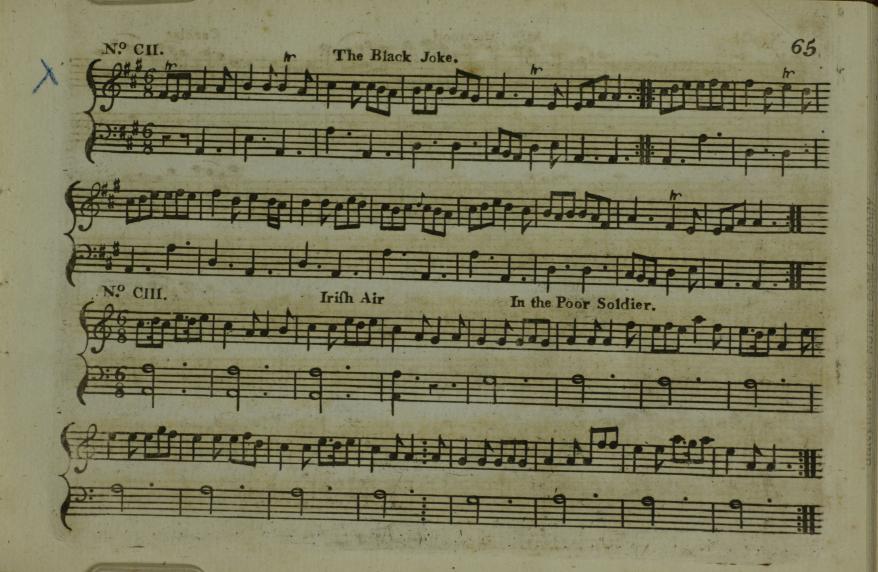
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